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## THE FINNS IN LANESVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

BY

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## THE FINNS IN LANESVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

BY

HELEN BABSON, A.M.<sup>1</sup>

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The colony investigated is located at Lanesville, Massachusetts, a small town situated on the northern coast of Cape Ann, ten miles from the fishing port of Gloucester and thirty-five miles up the North Shore from Boston. It can be reached by train over the Boston and Maine Railroad to Gloucester and thence by an electric line that circles the Cape. The commercial outlet, however, is principally by water, through the nearby town of Rockport, where the United States has increased the shipping facilities of the Harbor by a breakwater that required thirty-five years and three million dollars for its construction.

From the point of view of hygiene, the situation is ideal. The whole of Cape Ann is of granite foundation, sloping gradually back from the coast and affording excellent natural drainage into the ocean where there is a semi-daily tide rise of twelve feet on the average and deep water off the shore. Water facilities are excellent and there is no evidence that such a disease as typhoid has ever occurred in the colony. An abundance of open country—big rocky pastures—prevent any possibility of congestion and with several small sand beaches, curved now and then into the granite of the coast, offer playgrounds for the second generation.

In 1885 two Finnish fishermen, arriving in Gloucester Harbor (Gloucester and Rockport are the two towns on Cape Ann), heard of the money to be obtained, and deserted the schooners

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for the quarries. With that friendliness so often existing in simple folk, the Finns wrote to their friends in Finnland of the economic advantages they had found, and almost immediately others began to come. No evidence exists that steamship agents played any part in the emigration nor was there at that time any pressure in Finnland to cause the people to leave. It was, apparently, a clear case of labor seeking the place where its scarcity had been the cause of raising the standards of the wage.

By 1890, a considerable number of immigrants had arrived and between 1892 and 1900, 1,400 took up residence in Lanesville. Almost all of them came from Wasa Province in the north-western part of Finnland and many were engaged in quarrying in their native land. A few reported farming as their business in Finnland but for the greater number the migration did not mean a change in occupation.

The women began to come almost as soon as the men, for the Finns are a home loving people; the boarding system found in such large proportion among the Italians and Slavs is never practiced to any extent among them. Most of the men brought their wives and families with them or sent for them as soon as they obtained work.

There were, of course, often young women in their families old enough to go to work. Since there are no large factories in the vicinity, opportunity came to them to enter homes as house maids. By 1900, numbers of them were coming yearly, for the drop in emigration from Ireland, from which country many of the household servants of that time came, increased the demand, and several of the Finnish women who had come with the early arrivals carried on informal employment bureaus for the "green Finn" girls. In 1895 such a maid coming directly from Finnland, unused to the routine and detail of the American home, unable to understand or express herself in the strange tongue, could be secured for from one to two dollars a week. When she had learned the language, the wages would increase to perhaps three dollars but invariably she would marry before she was able really to speak English. Although this condition was most unsatisfactory for the American housekeeper, since it meant a continual "breaking in" of maids, it continued, through sheer lack of other source of supply, until about 1910 when the tide of immi-

gration turned from Lanesville to Worcester and Pittsfield because of the larger opportunity in the mills of those cities. For the last eight years Finnish servants are seldom found.

As has been stated, the men found ready employment in the quarries. The work was regulation stone cutting and was but one step removed from unskilled labor. In 1890 the working day was ten hours in length and the wage paid was at the rate of thirteen and a half cents an hour. There was little or no chance of promotion. But under his quiet submissive manner the Finn was always watching for a chance to obtain better returns and, with an independence as real and abiding as it was unostentatious, soon saw his way to a different financial basis.

The granite from which paving blocks are made comes from the ledges of solid stone which are probably the foundation of all Cape Ann. The quarries are established where large portions of the solid rock lie above or near the surface of soil which covers the foundation ledge. Huge blasts of powder separate this primeval stone, and the "pave gutter's" task is to split blocks of regulation size and shape from the detached masses. Before the demand arose for paving stone, most of the market was for large rectangular blocks, used in building or bridge construction, and because rock, like wood, has a definite grain and line of cleavage, the original mass, before the shaping, was much larger than the finished rectangle. The much smaller size of paving blocks made it possible to use lesser stone masses and in the detached boulders scattered all over the meadows of Lanesville and Rockport, the Finns saw their opportunity. Without proclamation or announcement, one by one they left their jobs in the quarries and went to work cutting their own paving from these boulders, from small outcrops on the hillsides or even from the refuse left outside the quarries, too small for other use. In an incredibly short time the locality was dotted with 'motions,' as they were called,—individual establishments set up wherever the Finn could find material on which to work. His equipment was of the simplest, most primitive order, involving almost no capital. A rough wooden bench set under a bit of canvas stretched across four posts to shield him from the sun, a stout heavy hammer, several steel awls,—and he was ready for work. Often the stone could be split without powder, but even when blasting was necessary the amount of explosive required

was slight. His hours of work were regulated by his own desire only (they frequently numbered from sunrise to sunset), and his children were of service after school in drilling powder holes or starting the first of the splitting. With the pressing demand for paving, the Rockport Granite Company paid forty dollars a thousand for block and at that rate one "motion" could earn from fifty-five to sixty-five dollars a month,—a considerable increase over the wage amount.

With this growth of prosperity came the start of house building. As has been suggested, the Finns are home lovers and the savings of frugal, careful living were invested in land. This was then mortgaged for materials for the houses, which in almost every case they built themselves. For the men seem able to turn their hands to all such tasks; and carpentry, painting and even plumbing were done by friends and neighbors, a group working after the day labor was completed, until one house was finished, and then turning to some other lot to build another house. The houses are small and plain but, although one seldom hears a Finn express pride in his possession, the labor put into their erection and the care given it during occupancy argues for his estimate of its worth.

From 1900 to 1905 the colony was the largest. During that period, however, the demand for paving decreased, owing to the increasing use of other street making material, so that by 1907 the "motions" began to disappear, the men returning to the quarry or leaving Lanesville for Worcester or Pittsfield, where there was a demand for factory hands. For this reason, very little new immigration has come to the Colony for the last eight years. This diminution was marked even before the World War had its effect on American immigration as a whole.

From the standpoint of assimilation, the Colony is very poorly situated. During the month of July and August, the summer boarders and the artists who frequent the vicinity in large numbers may often pass through it. But during the rest of the year, it may be isolated completely, for there is nothing to bring the outsider to that side of the Cape, and save for occasional trips to Rockport or Gloucester there is nothing to take the Finn away.

Generally speaking, the Finn of this Colony is not as large or as strong looking as the Swede or Norwegian. The men as

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a rule are of medium stature and a fat or even stout person is a rarity among them. The light hair—often nearly white—and the blue eyes of the northern races predominate, but occasionally one sees brown eyes and less frequently the brown hair. A light complexioned mother answered the surprise occasioned by the sight of one dark haired youngster among her tow headed brood, "The men from Spain, they sail to Finnish shores—long, long ago—and some of them stay and marry Finnish women and now sometimes our children have the Spanish color."

To a person unacquainted with the race, the Finns appear to have rather a surprising similarity of appearance, due perhaps to the fact that they exhibit so little facial expression. Any feeling or interest that a Finn may feel is generally hidden behind his still eyes and almost masklike face. It is impossible to tell what he is thinking or saying or to detect anything about his attitude by watching his expression. One almost never hears him laugh.

The Finns are universally vigorous and strong,—capable of a tremendous amount of physical exertion and endurance. The men will work all day in the quarries at heavy manual labor—especially in the earlier period before the use of machinery made less lifting of the stone necessary—and spend the evening working in their homes or those of their neighbors. The women will frequently do a day of washing or cleaning three days after confinement, and the Finnish servants at the close of a day of heavy house work will walk to town, sometimes five miles. Illness is seldom found in any form except tuberculosis, which is occasioned by the lack of ventilation and the heavy heating of the houses in the winter.

To any case of ill health they exhibit a peculiar indifference. During a visit to one of the homes a small child of about thirteen crept into the corner by herself to lie exhausted after a paroxysm of coughing, and her mother's only comment to the rather indignant protest that nothing was done for her was, "She die pretty soon." And they are equally stoical and indifferent to their own pain. A Finnish maid, who had made no complaint of toothache, indicated on her afternoon out that she wished to visit a dentist, and there she had extracted without a murmur a double tooth whose nerve had been exposed for days.

Industry seems to be a racial characteristic and idleness is

almost unknown among them. The men who work for themselves labor from sun-up to sun-down and those who are under the laws governing the hours of toil are found after the day's time at some home task. Like the people of the middle ages, they know how to do every sort of work and one man could finish an entire house without the help of modern day specialists, attending even to the plumbing—in a crude way, to be sure—himself. The women, besides doing the work of their own families, go out to wash and clean and in their spare minutes make quantities of rag rugs and knit lace. The rugs which they use in the place of carpets are not braided but woven on crude hand looms from the rags which they cut and sew into long strips, with much attention to the color; and often they weave designs or the initial of the maker into the scheme. The lace, although coarse, is often intricate in design and is used in every conceivable place in their homes. Frequently the garments of a wee tot show more of the heavy lace than of the material it trims. Drawn work and a sort of embroidery like cross stitch is often seen, done in bright colors and with large spreading designs. Though seldom rapid workers, the Finns are very thorough and sure and, when they understand what is expected of them, dependable.

A sense of hospitality splendid in its simplicity is common. Carefully dusted chairs are placed for the rent collectors and everywhere the homes are opened to the visitor. Among themselves they are much given to friendly gatherings. On winter days, too cold or stormy to admit of work in the quarries, kitchens are filled to overflowing with men, women and children, the men along one wall smoking cheap tobacco in clay pipes, the women against the other, busy with their lace or embroidery while the children play on the floor. Everybody talks almost incessantly, apparently addressing no one in particular, while the tightly closed doors and windows and the stove, red hot with a roaring fire, make the room far from a pleasant place for an American.

Lacking the quick flare of passion of the southern races, the Finns show a high grade of morals, and prostitution seems unknown among them. They lack a delicacy and a standard of propriety, yet coarseness and lewdness are rarely seen. Thieving and similar crimes requiring a cleverness and a quick wit



are never found, and honesty, as a principle not as a policy, prevails.

It is, of course, a mistake to characterize too closely the mental capacity of a community as a whole, yet, generally speaking, attempts to teach the Finns have been met by what seems to be unsurmountable stolidity. A closer study of this, however, seems to prove that it is not so much their inability to learn as it is their utter lack of understanding of the method used. Somehow it seems impossible to sit at a table with the most improved book on English for foreigners and obtain results. A certain stoical confusion is sure to end the lesson. Yet the same pupil, alone in her kitchen, will be heard saying over and over to herself as she works, "Dish, fork, water." And in her own primitive fashion,—which, by the way, is the method used now in the best of the books published for this purpose,—she masters the language.

In the years of the existence of the Colony, there is hardly a case of intermarriage outside their own nationality. The withdrawal is rather to themselves, not away from others. They simply "mind their own business" and go about their simple lives indifferent to everything that does not concern them. They make no demands on their new country, finding their economic and social expression in their own way and in the confines of the colony. Yet where relationship has been established they expect, with a sort of childish trust, such help as they need. In the days when the Colony flourished in large numbers, the man from whom they bought their lumber and who held the mortgage on some of their homes was frequently summoned to the police station, sometimes at midnight, to furnish bail for the Finn, whose day in town had landed him under the hand of the law.

Of their diet, fish forms the principal dish and is generally fried. The rocky shore on which the Colony is situated abounds in perch, rock cod and so forth, and the supply for the family is easily caught or bought from the off-shore fishermen. When fresh fish is not obtainable, there is always a supply of hake, mackerel or halibut in the Gloucester market. Many families have small gardens for vegetables and a hen coop is seen tucked away in the corner of many of the yards. The newly arrived families make a Finnish bread,—big, round loaves with holes in the center and baked very hard (they explain that in Finland they hung the loaves away on sticks through these holes). These

loaves are made in large numbers with a long time between bakings and, to the American palate, are sour and disagreeable in taste.

Even in the day when new immigration was coming one never saw any peculiarity in the dress of the men, save for the fact that they inevitably wore heavy scarfs of coarse wool, which they twisted around and around their necks and kept on, indoors and out. It seemed to make little difference to them that the New England winters were not nearly as severe as those of their native land, for they persisted in protecting their throats. The women on their arrival wore long, very full woollen skirts of some dull color and cotton waists made like a sort of sack, extending below the waist, long aprons with a wide border of bright embroidery, and, if they were married a square of cotton folded into triangular shape tied over the head. The hair was drawn tightly back from the face and up into a hard knot behind.

The mothers, confined to the house, did not for some time change this costume, but during the last eight years, when there has been no new immigration and the children have more and more been introducing American customs, one seldom sees the full skirts or head pieces. The younger women who went into the homes as servants adopted American styles for their outer garments as soon as their wages would allow their purchase, but it frequently took over a year's residence to bring about a change in the heavy underwear. They gained, as it were, the mere outward appearance of Americanization, even to their dress.

Those who own their own houses show much pride in keeping them clean and neat, and the yards are always in good order. It is in the tenements that the best opportunity to study the most primitive home conditions are found. Some of these three story houses were first built by Finns themselves who planned to live in them and rent the unused rooms. But the decline of the paving industry prevented the consummation of a business project which demanded so large an output of capital. The houses are all practically alike, a center hall, steep and narrow stairs, with two tenements on either side for each floor.

The entire Colony contributed to the building of the social hall, a large well built structure near the church, where various gatherings of a community nature are held.

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Religiously, the Finns show a splendid example of uniformity. Almost to a man this Colony are Lutherans and the church is a dominant factor in their living. In 1900, they built their own building in a prominent location in the center of the Colony. It is a substantial oblong building costing fifteen hundred dollars, constructed as are the churches in their own country with a small front entry to keep the cold of the outside from the main hall. Behind the altar at the back is a large picture of Christ in Gethsemane but the rest of the walls are bare, for this Colony is a poor one and can contribute per family not over twenty-five cents weekly which goes to the support of the minister, to whom they pay one thousand dollars a year.

Under the direction of the denomination, a summer school of one month is conducted for the children, with the double purpose of preparing them for confirmation and of keeping alive the Finnish language and tradition in the second generation. For while the mother tongue is always the language of the home, the children growing up in the American schools do not learn to read and write in Finnish. The instructor, a Finnish woman explained that the Finnish college in Hancock, Michigan, superintended the arrangements for the school and prepared the teachers for their duties. The expenses are met by the families as far as is possible but, as is the case at Lanesville, the denomination supplements the budget where the Colony is unable to carry it all. The sessions—mornings for the wee folk under ten and afternoons for the other children—are held in the church hall, cleared for the purpose of its Sunday benches, equipped with rough tables made by laying boards across saw horses, and arranged in a square around the teacher's desk,—the boys along the sides and the girls at the back. Because of the variation of age and previous learning, much of the work must be done by individual attention, so that the children, one at a time, stand by the teacher's desk for recitation. The older children memorize the ten commandments (all, of course, in Finnish). The folk tales of the race have their place in the morning schedule, and history in the afternoon. The children are ready for the communion class at about fifteen or sixteen years of age and the passing of the examination at its close makes them eligible for confirmation. The registration for 1917, which was the fifth year of the school, shows a total of seventy-six, forty-four

of whom were in the morning class. The school, in spite of lack of equipment, appears to be very well organized and conducted, and the teacher is most courteous and ready to answer questions and explain the general methods.

It is evident from every angle that the Finns have come to America for permanent residence. Besides the testimony of houses and church building, questions regarding the matter bring surprise that any other idea should be conceived. Yet no effort to acquaint themselves with the possibility of uniting politically with the new country has been made by the community. When opportunity for naturalization has been presented, as it sometimes is by members of their own race or by the minister, they do not refuse to become citizens, but the fact that a small percentage only have taken out papers is directly traceable to lack of effort to interest them rather than to their own unwillingness.

When the government has been negligent, however, other organizations have been active. As early as 1890, socialist leaders were spreading their ideals in the Colony, a type of philosophy not entirely new to the Finns, since much had been done in their native land to make its principles familiar. In America, however, free from any governmental restraint, the idea found opportunity for rapid growth in the Finnish love of independence, suppressed for so many years but never destroyed. In 1895 a branch was formed (not, however, affiliated with the national order) and its meetings, with general socialistic programs, were held in the social hall. By 1905 this cause had so gained the allegiance of the Finns that they purchased a building of their own and at the present time various gatherings, of both social and business nature, are held there under the auspices of the local association.

Like most of the immigration from Northern Europe, the Finn undoubtedly makes a good citizen. He has but few vices and many of the sturdy virtues,—honesty, industry, temperance and best of all a capacity for independence and a genuine desire for higher economic and social standards. The second generation, tested by the American school, make splendid records. The teacher of the Lanesville grammar grades states that the children are intelligent, teachable, easy to train in both studies and discipline, and that her greatest difficulty lies in their poor Eng-

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lish, which they acquire in the home. The fact that the population of Cape Ann has decreased by several thousands, according to the census of 1900 and 1910, makes it even more imperative that some step be taken to conserve and use this strong, vigorous, new blood. If the ability to organize and execute, expressed in their church school and their desire for democratic ideals which has shown itself in their socialistic societies could be turned to the community for its own use, how great would be the contribution.

This would be easily possible through a program of Americanization for, as has been stated, the Finn is not indifferent to advances in this direction. The simplest agency is, of course, the school. There is no good reason why an evening session in English, simple arithmetic, special classes in American cooking and sewing, and talks on American ideals and standards should not be conducted. Since there is no summer program to use the school building, classes of this nature could easily be given during the months of July and August, drawing, if necessary, from the large summer colony for college people as instructors. With these, regulation Americanization classes such as have been put into operation in large cities, could be maintained and at the completion of which arrangements could be made for naturalization. Both Gloucester and Rockport have "Parent Teachers Associations," which might profitably interest themselves in including the Finnish women in their membership, since the pride in children will often prove an easy avenue of approach. It is, indeed, through such agencies as this that most can be accomplished, since much of true social value can be achieved through working with rather than working for.

Vocational classes and courses in occupational guidance would do much to interest the young people in remaining in Lanesville and establishing an industrial center. At present, there is nothing but work in the quarries open to them and many, therefore, leave Lanesville for the mills of western Massachusetts. They are, for instance, natural farmers, and there is much untilled land in the vicinity.

Co-operation through their strong church organization seems possible. Unfortunately, there are no other Lutheran churches in the vicinity, but through such inter-denominational agencies as the Christian Endeavor, relationship could be established. In

the summer, when several denominations unite for union picnics, an invitation to this sister church might be extended. The women's societies could do a great deal in their missionary activities if the first step were taken.

The place, however, where all programs could best center is in the Gloucester city government. With the various committees of civic administration, one on immigration could be included with responsibility to see that not only this Colony but two others within its city limits—one of Portuguese and one of Italians—had their share in every possible activity. If the Colony could be kept informed by this committee, in a fashion which they could comprehend, of the civic questions as they arise, surely men who care enough to build a social hall for community activities would respond to do their share. If newly naturalized citizens could, through this committee, be given their chance to participate in governmental activities, surely the instinct for independence would take opportunity to develop into true democracy, rather than to express itself in the propaganda of socialism or radicalism.

It is, however, a matter of fact that Cape Ann lacks that social consciousness without which little of value along this line can be put into operation. And so the little Colony continues to exist as it has for years, almost entirely to and for itself. What the war, with its broadening of social tendencies, may bring to this New England conservatism, is only a matter of conjecture, but to one who has learned to appreciate the potentialities of the Finn, the negligence on the part of the community seems almost unforgivable.